

# ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022

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DOWNTOWN  
BUSINESS COMMISSION **HALIFAX**





Photo:  
Tourism Nova Scotia

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# CEO'S MESSAGE



**Paul MacKinnon**  
Chief Executive Officer

Photo (left): Discover Halifax

## ***"What is the state of the Downtown?"***

I get the question often, and it is a tough one to answer in one sentence, or even in a few paragraphs. Downtown is a relatively small geographic area but we are a complex ecosystem of residents. From high-end condo dwellers to unhoused people on the street, to visitors, office workers, and owners of businesses ranging from international finance firms to local coffee shops. As 2022 saw the end of lockdowns (hopefully) and we begin to adapt to the reality of living with COVID-19, I can tell you there are as many positive trends as negative ones.

Downtown Halifax was the fastest growing downtown in the country over the past five years, and there is no sign of slowing in sight. With a residential vacancy rate of less than 1%, our development community is struggling to keep up with demand. Inflation is rampant, and restaurants are always the first impacted by cost changes. Tourism is firing on all cylinders again, welcoming back cruise ships, events and conventions. Flexible working environments, a trend vastly accelerated by the pandemic, is here to stay. People will still be working in Downtown offices, but how many and how often remains to be seen. This will certainly impact the businesses who are dependent upon the Monday to Friday office crowd. These trends mean we expect to see changes in the business mix downtown. However, even in the darkest days of the pandemic, Downtown Halifax consistently saw more businesses open than close. Overall, I believe there is reason for optimism. We see a future for Downtown which is less about being a central business district and more about being a complete community.

Thirty-five years after its incorporation, DHBC continues to be a leader on all things Downtown, and will be focused on four goals moving forward: attracting people, increasing sales, stimulating investment, and propelling organizational improvement. We are here to help you, our members, navigate these rapidly changing times.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul MacKinnon".



## WHO WE ARE

Downtown Halifax Business Commission (DHBC) is a not-for-profit organization that represents the 1600+ businesses located in the Downtown core. We run many programs, events, and marketing initiatives to help make Downtown Halifax a better place to live, work, and play.

## VISION

Canada's Favourite Downtown

## MISSION

To passionately pursue a more prosperous and vibrant Downtown.

If your business is located in Downtown Halifax, you are automatically a member of DHBC. DHBC represents all organizations, including property owners and tenants, located in the area between the Halifax Waterfront and the waterside of Brunswick Street, and between the Cogswell Interchange and the south end of Barrington Street.

This Annual Report highlights the resources, supports, and programs that DHBC provides to help organizations and businesses make the best of being in Downtown Halifax. If you have questions along the way, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us:

info@downtownhalifax.ca or 902-423-6658  
 1546 Barrington Street, Suite 104, Halifax, NS  
 downtownhalifax.ca



# DHBC STAFF



**Kimberly Dossett**  
 Director of Finance &  
 Operations



**Allana MacDonald Mills**  
 Director of Marketing



**Jessica Pettigrew**  
 Membership Engagement  
 Manager



**Jonathan Goldson**  
 Placemaking Manager



**Raf Peligro**  
 Marketing & Communications  
 Coordinator



**Eric Jonsson**  
 Program Coordinator,  
 Navigator Street Outreach

**Vacant:**  
 Communications Manager  
 Administrative Assistant

*Photo: Tourism Nova Scotia*

# BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2021-2022

**Christian Rankin, Chair**  
Obladee Wine Bar & Wonderlust Media

**Marilisa Benigno, Vice Chair**  
Benigno Group of Companies

**Issmat Al-Akhali, Secretary Treasurer**  
Granville Hall Student Residence

**Gordon Whittaker, Past Chair**  
Side Door

**Erin Esiyok-Prime, Member at Large**  
Events East Group

**Jeff Ransome, Member at Large**  
Halifax Marriott Harbourfront Hotel

**Melissa Carey**  
RCR Hospitality Group

**Ashwin Kutty**  
WeUsThem Inc.

**Matthew Martel**  
Black Business Initiative

**Nathalie Morin**  
Rousseau Chocolatier

**Blaise Morrison**  
The Armour Group Limited

**Kristin O'Toole**  
Develop Nova Scotia

**Sanjeev Pushkarna**  
Nova Scotia Power

**Jake Whalen**  
Halifax Regional Municipality

# ACTION TEAM MEMBERS 2021-2022

## ADVOCACY ACTION TEAM

**Christian Rankin**  
Obladee Wine Bar & Wonderlust Media

**Gordon Whittaker**  
Side Door

**Issmat Al-Akhali**  
Granville Hall Student Residence

**Jeff Ransome**  
Halifax Marriott Harbourfront Hotel

**Sanjeev Pushkarna**  
Nova Scotia Power

**Kristin O'Toole**  
Develop Nova Scotia

## MARKETING ACTION TEAM

**Renae Perry**  
Events East Group

**Krista Lingley**  
Parks Canada

**Melissa Carey**  
RCR Hospitality Group

**Laura Oakley**  
Legendary Hospitality Group

**Holly Chessmen**  
Discover Halifax

**Tanya Arsenault**  
Halifax Marriott Harbourfront Hotel

**Jenna Rideout**  
Develop Nova Scotia

**Leah Veinot**  
Discovery Centre

**Emily Richards**  
Neptune Theatre

## PLACEMAKING ACTION TEAM

**Adriana Afford**  
Argyle Fine Art

**Mike Burt**  
Mural Grant Jury Member

**Lindsay Ann Cory**  
Nocturne

**James Janssen**  
Mural Grant Jury Member

**T.J. Maguire**  
Develop Nova Scotia

**Matthew Martel**  
Black Business Initiative

**Nathalie Morin**  
Rousseau Chocolatier

**Annie Cameron**  
Discover Halifax

**Grant Ruffinengo**  
Onside

**Jeremy Smith**  
Freak Lunchbox

**Amber Solberg**  
Mural Grant Jury Member

**Jake Whalen**  
Halifax Regional Municipality

**Elora Wilkinson**  
Mural Grant Jury Member

**Rose Zack**  
Mural Grant Jury Member

## MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT ACTION TEAM

**Erin Esiyok-Prime**  
Events East

**Marilisa Benigno**  
Benigno Group of Companies

**Mitch Donnelly**  
Introhive

**Jamie Franzmann**  
Discovery Centre

**Griffin Hewitt**  
Reef Technology



Photo: Tourism Nova Scotia

# ADVOCACY



Photo: DHBC



Photo: Fraser Photography



Photo: Ryan Williams | Unbound Media

DHBC was one of the founding members of the Nova Scotia Business Labour and Economic Coalition (NSBLEC), which worked closely with government partners to steer through the pandemic. Between March 2020 and March 2022 NSBLEC met 135 times, representing 200,000 employees.

DHBC provided our membership with a collective voice at the table on all major issues concerning Downtown Halifax, including COVID-19 relief programs, planning and development, and urban mobility. We speak directly to government, the media, and other stakeholders on our members' behalf. Our 2021-2022 highlights include:

## FEDERAL

Member of International Downtown Association (IDA) Canada's Leadership group, as we developed federal priorities for Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) nationally.

Active membership in the Canadian Urban Institute's (CUI) "Bring Back Main Street," "Restore the Core," "City Talk," and "CUI x Local" initiatives.

Presented to the Big Cities Mayors Caucus (BCMC) of Federal Canadian Municipalities (FCM) on downtown priorities.

Met with MP Andy Fillmore, other MPs, and the Prime Minister's Office to **ADVOCATE FOR COVID-19 RELIEF PROGRAMS AND DOWNTOWN INVESTMENTS.**

## PROVINCIAL

Shared election questionnaire responses with members from all provincial parties as part of election advocacy.

Worked with NS BIDs, successfully lobbied provincial governments to create COVID-19 restriction support programs in the spring and the fall, and to launch a consumer confidence campaign.

**SUCCESSFULLY LOBBIED FOR PROVINCIAL LEGISLATION TO ALLOW FOR DOGS ON OUTDOOR PATIOS.**

Met with Premier Houston's office, as well as various MLAs to advocate for various Covid relief support programs.



Photo: DHBC

## MUNICIPAL

Met with Mayor Savage, Councillor Mason, and other HRM councillors and staff, on a regular basis.

Worked with HRM on various pandemic support programs, such as waived patio fees, event waiver, hotel tax relief, open streets, Grand Parade entertainment, etc.

Successful passage of new Argyle Entertainment noise bylaw.

Worked with Halifax Regional Police Department Chief Kinsella and Area Inspector Clarke, to discuss ongoing policing priorities.

### SUCCESSFUL PASSAGE BY HRM COUNCIL OF DIFFERENTIATED COMMERCIAL TAX RATES.

Supported the \$7 million HRM contribution to the new Art Gallery of Nova Scotia.

Stakeholder consultations held regarding Lower Water and Brunswick Street mobility infrastructure plans.

Submitted Downtown and Main Streets recommendations for incorporation in Halifax Partnership's 2022-2027 Economic Growth Plan.



# 12 DELIGHTFUL DOWNTOWN LIGHT SHOWS

# PLACEMAKING

Photo: Stoo Metz Photography



Photo: Stoo Metz Photography

*DHBC champions best practices in Downtown planning, design, management and utilization of public spaces that inspire continuing and increasing vibrancy in Downtown Halifax. Our 2021-2022 highlights include:*

DELIGHTFUL DOWNTOWN featured 12 light shows at Grafton Park from October - March, attracting thousands of spectators. Light show themes included: Fall, Halloween, Remembrance Day, Winter, Holiday/New Year's, African Heritage Month, Valentine's Day, Heritage Day, Spring, March Break, Saint Patrick's Day, and DELIGHTFUL DOWNTOWN Rerun.

Daily average of 228 spectators and 726 passersby. 25% of total park visitors watched the light shows.

**DELIGHTFUL DOWNTOWN FEATURED IN LOCAL AND NATIONAL MEDIA, SUCH AS SALTWIRE, THE CHRONICLE HERALD, CBC, CTV, AND EASTLINK TV.**

Themed gobo projections were displayed on Downtown buildings.

78 Get Ready for Summer grants were approved to help qualifying businesses make improvements to their storefront or patio for the summer.





Photo: Stoo Metz Photography



Photo: Stoo Metz Photography



Photo: DHBC

16 bistro tables, 50 chairs, and lights were installed in Granville Mall.

In partnership with HRM, an additional rainbow crosswalk was installed at the Barrington and Sackville Street intersection.

149 Christmas wreaths installed along Downtown streets.

30 painted picnic tables, including wheelchair accessible tables, were placed throughout 6 locations, including: Raymond Taavel Park, Peace and Friendship Park, Argyle Street, Granville Mall, Province House, and the Waterfront (behind 'I Heart Bikes').

3 organizations/events were promoted through DHBC's banner pole program, including: The Holiday Parade of Lights, Soli Productions, and NSCAD. DHBC also installed banners identifying the Old South Suburb Heritage Conservation District and the Barrington Heritage District.

**84 DECK THE DOWNTOWN GRANTS WERE APPROVED**

to help qualifying businesses decorate their store for the Winter season.

**4 GRITTY TO PRETTY MURAL GRANTS WERE APPROVED**

and completed, including: "Rising Tide" by John McPartland, located on the side of 1505 Barrington Street, "Warm Welcome" by Kristen De Palma, located on the side of 1669 Granville Street, "Magic Meadows" by Sarah Cannon, located at 1560 Grafton Street, and the Marriott Harbourfront Hotel Murals series, located at 1919 Upper Water Street, completed by artists Daniel Burt, Swade Owens, Donny Fraser, and Mike Burt.

**OUR GRAFFITI REMOVAL PROGRAM WIPED OFF 922 SQ FT. AND PAINTED OVER 498 SQ FT.**

7 Downtown Crew members were hired to help maintain the cleanliness and beauty of Downtown during tourist season.

Maintained the 4 poster kiosks and 9 pole collars that are used for community advertising Downtown.

Peace and Friendship Park, Grafton Park and Bedford Row featured LED-lit tree-wraps. Additionally, a 26-foot tall holiday tree, lamp pole lights and decorations were installed in Peace and Friendship Park.

**20 SPONSORED EVENTS**



Photo: Fraser Photography

**MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS**



Photo: Michelle Doucette Photography

DHBC promotes the Downtown core as a place to work, shop, dine, play, and live. Our marketing programs promote: Downtown as a destination; existing businesses; and Downtown's advantages as a place to invest and open a business. "With the goal of putting feet on the street," DHBC works with event organizers to attract and promote Downtown events, to ensure they are successful for both the organizers and our members. Our 2021-2022 highlights include:

Sponsored 20 events, including the SaltWire Holiday Parade of Lights, the Prismatic Arts Festival, the Halifax Urban Folk Festival, Haliente's Salsa & Bachata Festival, the Blue Nose Marathon, Nocturne Art at Night, Garba Night on the Waterfront, and more.



Photo: Stoo Metz  
Photography

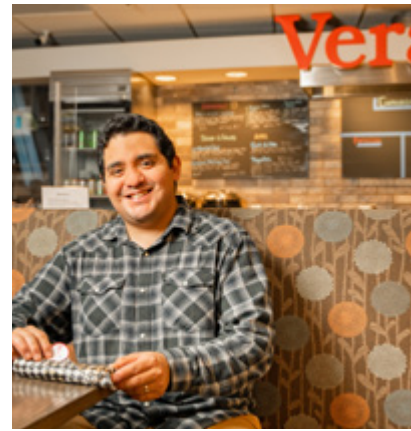


Photo: Ryan Williams | Unbound Media



Photo: The Coast



Photo: DHBC

4,204 new followers on Instagram.

**51.4K TOTAL INSTAGRAM FOLLOWERS.**

3 summer campaigns (Meet Me Downtown, Patio Season in Downtown Halifax, and Pups on Patios).

Updated brand photography and video.

Holiday campaigns (Holiday Gift Guide, Shop Local in Downtown Halifax) and promotion of DELIGHTFUL DOWNTOWN and Evergreen Festival.

2 winter campaigns (Valentine's Day, March Break) and promotion of Dine Around.

4 partner campaigns, including: Maritime BIDs 'Discover Downtowns' campaign with CTV, Hidden Gems with Halifax Chamber of Commerce, Shopping Under the Stars with Spring Garden Area Business Association (SGABA), Free Ferry for March Break with Downtown Dartmouth Business Commission (DDBC).

Downtown Lowdown podcast ran until December 2021.

Ran a parking campaign (print, digital, and social) that included free on-street parking for various occasions (Shopping Under the Stars, March Break).

**40 ONLINE MARKETING ASSISTANCE GRANTS WERE GIVEN TO BUSINESSES**

to improve their online digital presence and reach.

Coordinated print and digital ads for Discover Halifax, Curated Magazine and Guide, Sea Nova Scotia, Neptune Theatre, My East Coast Experience, Family Fun Halifax, The Coast, Eastlink, SaltWire/The Chronicle Herald, and more.

17 local musicians were scheduled to perform at DHBC's Tunes at Noon.

Continuous updating of website and online events calendar.

Coordinated and hosted quarterly marketing webinars for members.



**138** IN-PERSON MEMBER VISITS

# MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT



Photo: Michelle Doucette Photography

*DHBC works to build relationships with members, be a resource for problem-solving, and advocate for common issues. We strive to enhance awareness and promotion of member benefits, provide opportunities for members to give input into existing and emerging issues, and create networking events, information sessions, workshops, tools, programs, and resources for members to engage through. Our 2021-2022 highlights include:*

138 in-person member visits, distributing marketing materials and welcome packages, conducting Downtown Spotlight interviews, celebrating business milestones, accomplishments, and more.

Engaged with over 200 community members at Parade of Lights event, activating DHBC's Welcome Centre.

Photo: Discover Halifax



Photo: Michelle Doucette Photography



Photo: Courtesy of Skin Decision Inc



Photo: DHBC

### PLANNING FOR A DHBC WEBSITE REBUILD TO BETTER SERVE OUR MEMBERS AND COMMUNITY.

18 Downtown Spotlight interviews completed and featured on DHBC's social media.

2 member events (DHBC's holiday social and CFL information session for members).

100 members attended DHBC's holiday social.

40 members engaged in external partnership programs/campaigns (HotSpot parking validation program and Halifax Chamber of Commerce's Buy Local Campaign).

Instructed several new and current members on how to use the DHBC website to update member pages and add events.

Maintained DHBC's member database and website content.

Sent member e-mail communications, including, but not limited to: dedicated e-blasts, invites, notices, advisories, engagement opportunities.

Responded to all member and visitor inquiries.

Maintained a list of businesses that opened, closed, and relocated during 2021-2022.

Contributed to bi-weekly member newsletter and social media content.

Record response rate in a membership-wide pulse survey to plan accordingly for 2022-2023 fiscal.

# 18 DOWNTOWN SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEWS

# NAVIGATOR STREET OUTREACH



Photo: Stoo Metz Photography

*Navigator Street Outreach (NSO) offers direct support to homeless and street-involved individuals on the streets of Downtown Halifax. The initiative, entering its 14<sup>th</sup> year, is a partnership between DHBC and Spring Garden Area Business Association and also receives funding from HRM. This outreach is but one essential component of a comprehensive strategy to end homelessness in our community.*

# 229 INDIVIDUALS SUPPORTED BY NAVIGATOR

From April 1, 2021, to March 31, 2022, NSO supported 229 individuals in HRM. This includes, but is not limited to support in finding housing, employment, and medication access.



Photo: Discover Halifax

# MEMBER PROGRAMS & RESOURCES

As a Downtown Halifax Business Commission (DHBC) member, you are entitled to the many member programs and resources, including, but not limited to:

- EVENT SPONSORSHIP **BUSINESS PROMOTION**
- DHBC MARKETING & CAMPAIGNS
- PARKING INITIATIVES** MEMBER GRANT PROGRAMS
- WELCOME PACKAGE & NEW-BUSINESS VISITS
- DHBC ACTION TEAMS PEDESTRIAN COUNTER DATA
- DOWNTOWN SPOTLIGHT SERIES**
- PLACEMAKING** DHBC WEBSITE
- BI-WEEKLY MEMBER NEWSLETTER **DHBC ADVOCACY**
- DOWNTOWN HALIFAX WELCOME CENTRE**
- GRAFFITI CLEAN-UP PROGRAM **MEMBER EVENTS**

Please contact [jessica@downtownhalifax.ca](mailto:jessica@downtownhalifax.ca) for details on member programs and resources!



## HOW DHBC IS FUNDED

The idea of an organization devoted to serving a particular business improvement district (BID) is a very simple one: businesses in a defined area, typically a downtown or commercial main street, hold a vote and agree to create a special levy, which is added to their commercial taxes. This levy goes to a specific organization with a mandate to do marketing, events, advocacy, placemaking, networking, and undertake other projects of common interest. The very first BID in the world was created on Bloor Street, Toronto, in 1970. In the 50+ years since, hundreds of BIDs have formed in Canada, thousands in the United States and many more around the world.

Downtown Halifax Business Commission (DHBC) was established through a vote of the businesses in the Downtown in 1987. Once created by vote, the levy is mandatory. It is charged to all commercial property owners, identified as a separate line item on their municipal tax bill (which consists of eight different rates). Landlords typically then charge this proportionately to their tenants. Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) collects the levy and remits it to DHBC.

DHBC is led by a Board of Directors, consisting of members who are elected to their positions at the annual general meeting each June. The Board creates an annual budget and sets the appropriate levy amount to fund it. This amount then needs to be approved by HRM Council, as part of their annual budget process.

DHBC always seeks to provide excellent value for members. Whether you are a large multi-tenant landlord paying tens of thousands of dollars, or a small business paying several hundred dollars, we are happy to meet with you to discuss the return on investment you are getting from your DHBC membership.

# 2022-2023 BUDGET

Photo (left): Stoo Metz Photography

## REVENUE

Members Levy	\$1,229,985
Advocacy	\$132,289
Placemaking	\$277,975
Communications & Marketing	\$218,790
Member Engagement	\$0
Administrative	\$15,104
	\$1,874,143
Carry forward from 2021-2022	\$317,562

**TOTAL REVENUE** **\$2,191,705**

## OPERATING EXPENSES

Advocacy	\$250,951
Placemaking	\$549,405
Communications & Marketing	\$546,783
Member Engagement	\$53,000
Administrative	\$791,566

**TOTAL EXPENDITURES** **\$2,191,705**

**SURPLUS (DEFICIT)** **\$0**

## **DOWNTOWN HALIFAX BUSINESS COMMISSION**

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Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, B3J 3X7

Tel: (902) 423-6658

Email: [info@downtownhalifax.ca](mailto:info@downtownhalifax.ca)



**DOWNTOWNHALIFAX.CA**